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ABSTRACT

Drawing from the experiences of Oglala Lakota College (OLC) in South Dakota, this paper points to the philosophical and operational changes colleges and universities must make if they truly desire to recruit and retain significant numbers of minority students. The first section discusses the philosophical bases of tribal colleges, arguing that one of the key reasons for their success is the belief that students can remain Indian, practice tribal traditions, retain tribal values, and also be successful students. Taking exception to educational philosophies that dictate that minorities be brought into the social and economic mainstream, the paper underscores the importance of the fact that tribal colleges are community based, respect cultural traditions and values, and participate in the overall development of the community and reservation. The next section highlights recommendations from a variety of sources with respect to methods of recruiting and retaining minority students, but concludes that they stop short of ensuring the academic success of minority students. Background information is also provided on OLC and the social and economic problems confronting the people and the college on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Reasons for the success of OLC are cited next, including: (1) it was started by the people of the Pine Ridge Reservation and chartered by the Oglala Lakota Tribe; (2) its trustees are elected by and represent the tribal government and its staff is 77% Indian; and (3) the college serves as a community resource, offering programs that address specific reservation concerns, such as health, literacy, alcoholism, and family counseling. Concluding comments stress the importance to minority success of incorporating service to minorities as part of a college's mission, of having a physical presence in the minority community, of developing a supportive climate, of maintaining a cultural base, and of committing financial resources. (AAC)

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The 4 Year Community College: Tribal College

Some Lessons in Success for Indian Students in College

Submitted to:

Minorities In Higher Education Conference
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SUMMARY

The 20 Tribal colleges which are reservation-based and Tribally chartered have shown amazing success in working with Indian students and assisting them to achieve Associate degrees under the most adverse circumstances. Oglala Lakota College and Sinte Gleska College are two of the larger Tribal colleges and offer 4 year degrees and are working on graduate programs. Oglala Lakota College is based on the Pine Ridge Reservation which is the second largest reservation and the poorest county in the U.S. It can be used as an example of Tribal colleges and of what works with Indian students. Hopefully, lessons can be drawn from OLC's experience to help other colleges and universities to deal better with minority students. However, it must also be realized that to do some of the things OLC does colleges and universities would have to radically alter the way they think and the way they do business.

Philosophical Basic

> "There is of course, a dark and ugly side to the American experiment. In claiming the land of this continent, we took the lives and livelihoods of most of its original inhabitants. Our treatment of Native Americans from the earliest settlement of the colonies is the oldest expression of virulent racism that has plagued this nation."
>
> Robert H. Atwell, President, American Council in Education, remarks delivered 1/19/88

We begin with this quote just to acknowledge that racism has created some of the problems Indians face and that racism still exists in subtle and not so subtle ways. One of the key ways it persists is the thought that minorities must adopt the values of white society to gain knowledge and to take a full part in this country's bounty.

One of the key reasons for the Tribal college's success has been the belief and practice that students can remain Indian, can practice Tribal traditions and retain Tribal values and also be successful students. Further, we believe these traditions and values are intrinsic to Indian students' success and also make a contribution to society as a whole. As Robert Atwell further states in his remarks on minorities in higher education:

> "But our image was wrong, and we should have been creating a stew, not a bisque. The melting pot metaphor has outlived its usefulness. It is time to create a new metaphor, one that reveres the integrity of each unique element of our society."

A second key element of philosophical basis is that education does not exist in a vacuum and to be truly successful we must acknowledge the "barriers of poverty" and their effects on minority students. We must also affirm higher education's role not only to assist minority students to overcome these effects but also to have as a purpose the elimination of these barriers and the extension of the opportunity for a "good life," as the group defines it, to all people.

Atwell states on this point:

> "Decent housing, adequate health care, good nutrition and job opportunities are integral parts of the package that will bring minorities into the social and economic mainstream. We can neither wait for all of these to fall into place, nor ignore the fact that education is a partner, perhaps the most important one, in social change."

We agree with him on the importance of overall social, economic and community development and with education as a catalyst or partner. We take exception to the word "mainstream" if it conveys the surrender of Tribal rights or traditional values. Economic and social progress must be defined by minority groups themselves.

Rebecca Adamson, Cherokee, founder and President of First Nations Financial Project states:

> "We cannot educate Indian children, preserve their health, or protect their well-being if our livelihood is dependent on others. Tribes will emerge from dependency only by developing capacity to control their economic future."

The Tribal colleges have shown that being based in the community and respecting cultural traditions and values and including the overall development of the community and reservation in the mission contribute not only to individual student's success but also institutional viability and effectiveness.

Lionel Bordeaux, President of Sinte Gleska College on the Rosebud reservation for the past fifteen years and President of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, states this underlying philosophy well in a paper on Tribal colleges and economic development:

> "The experiences of tribal colleges demonstrate that, when presented with meaningful, accessible opportunities, significant numbers of reservation residents -- students, faculty, and administrators -- will make incredible sacrifices to work toward goals they recognize as important. The same dedication, intelligence, capacity for hard work and prudent choices will be available for economic change as well, as new opportunities for jobs and growth become available."

What Others Say About Minorities In Higher Education

In a 1977 report by the General Accounting Office to the Secretary of Interior on Indians in higher education, the following key problems were cited:

- Poor academic background - low scores in reading and math, low level of parents' education.
- Culture shock - non-competitive to competitive, rural to urban, Indian values vs white values.
- Inadequate counseling and tutoring

The recommendations include:

- Develop information system to track students and monitor drops.
- Develop Native American studies curriculum.
- Familiarize faculty with Indian culture.
- Develop college survival skills course.
- Arrange for high school students to visit colleges.
- Identify careers in demand for Indians, on and off the reservation.

Frank H.T. Rhodes, on an Occasional Paper presented to the Academy for Educational Development in May, 1987 on how to meet the challenge of minority participation, makes the following similar recommendations:

1) more imaginative and effective recruiting
2) work on retention - monitoring, mentoring, advising
3) "set up a climate that welcomes and nurtures individuals from minority backgrounds"
4) provide more funding and employment

The AACJC Policy Statement on Minorities in Community Colleges (4/88) makes some of the same recommendations but adds some key ones, no doubt influenced by John Roueche and George Baker's study of Miami - Dade, Access and Excellence:

- begin college counseling at the junior high level
- work with high schools on curricular articulation
- assure minority representation on committees, in media, in curriculum
- test for placement not screening out
- develop new strategies for obtaining and disbursing student aid so students are not burdened with debt.
- take steps to develop minority faculty

Patrick Penn in a recent study at Oberlin College states that "Black students often drop out of college because they feel broke, lonely and alienated." He says lack

of money and subtle forms of racial discrimination cause this. He recommends counseling.

We will not do more elaborate quoting on what people say since most of the key points of all the literature have been stated one way or another in the previous cites and Roueche and Baker have covered the ground of balancing access and high academic standards.

We agree with all of the previous recommendations, and indeed Oglala Lakota College has put many of them into practice, but we don't think they go far enough. The recommendations are geared to getting minorities into higher education as it is today, and although this is an admirable goal if truly pursued, we believe the more pressing and necessary goal is to get higher education into minorities. Oglala Lakota College and the other Tribal colleges are examples of how this can be done. Also let us acknowledge that there are also other institutions, both rural and urban, called community based colleges that are pioneering in this effort. Institutions such as the Highlander Center in Tennessee, Sojourner Douglass in Baltimore and St. Augustine College in Chicago are the grass roots of this movement and are joined together by the Association for Community Based Education based in Washington, DC.

We will use Oglala Lakota College as our main example since we are most familiar with it and because of its gathering of resources OLC has been fortunate to branch out into many of the areas we consider key. First, some background.

Background

Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, American Horse, Wounded Knee, Running Brave, Mystic Warrior, Black Elk Speaks - all of these are names that relate to the Oglala band of Lakota (the traditional name for the Sioux), who live on the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota. Through 150 years that have included wars with the United States, the taking of lands, confinement to the reservation, and attempts to stamp out the Lakota language and values, a legacy of federal policies have reduced the Oglala Lakota to the poorest people in this country.

Over eighteen thousand Oglala Lakota live on the 7,000 square miles that make up the Pine Ridge Reservation. According to the 1980 U.S. Census this area is cited as the poorest in the entire nation with a per capita income of $2,637.00. The Bureau of Indian Affairs reported in 1984 that unemployment hovers around 84 percent. Nearly sixty percent of the reservation families live below the poverty level.

The infant death rate among Indian people is three times higher, and the incidence of tuberculosis is eight times higher, than the U.S. average. A high incidence of alcoholism, a suicide rate which is at least three times higher than that of the rest of the population, and the lowest life expectancy of any group in America further attest to the grim conditions facing the Lakota population today.

There are also substantial problems in the area of educational attainment. According to South Dakota Division of Education's 1978 assessment of educational programs, less that 20 percent of the Lakota population have completed high school, and fewer than 50 percent have completed grammar school. In a recent study conducted by the College, 50 percent of the Indians completing eighth grade dropped out before graduating from high school. It is estimated that the dropout rate for Oglalas going away to college is between 80 and 90 percent. In 1978, less than one percent of the population had completed four years of college.

These statistics, and many others, paint a bleak picture of the reservation. Indeed, compared to the general population, and even other minority populations, the statistics could lead to despair. The Lakota people were subjected to the severest form of "future shock" 150 years ago, but a spark of the tribal values and identity stayed lit and is now lighting the fire of a tribal resurgence.

Oglala Lakota College was chartered by the Oglala Sioux Tribe in 1971. For the first 12 years the College operated through agreements with other colleges. The passage of the Tribally Controlled Community College Act in 1978 granted the College a stable funding base for the first time. Growth and development followed quickly. In June, 1983, OLC was accredited at the four year degree level by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The College is the largest of only two accredited four year colleges located on Indian reservations in this country.

Oglala Lakota College is the fastest growing higher education institution in South Dakota. Enrollment at the College has nearly doubled in the past five years: 554 students in Spring 1983 to 1,050 students in Spring 1988. About 88 percent of the students are Native American and nearly 100 percent are first generation college students. The average age of the student body is about 30. Since 50 percent of the reservation population is under 18 years of age, there is great potential for future growth.

Although the College is seventeen years old there was never a funding base until 1980 and there were many restrictions until the freedom of accreditation was achieved

in 1983. The College has granted 65 Bachelors degrees since 1982 when the first B.S. was granted. The College has granted 475 Associate degrees. Over 63% of all graduates have graduated in the past five years.

In 1982 a follow up of OLC graduates show 90% were employed and 8% were pursuing further education. This is remarkable on a reservation with near 80% unemployment. In the graduate follow up done in 1987 the rates had gone to 74% employed and 16% in school. This shows the economic depression of the reservation and the need for the college to get into community and economic development.

Some comments outsiders have made about OLC:

"In a land so barren that it became known years ago as the Badlands, and in a community so poor that it had the nation's lowest per capita income in 1980, a tribally controlled college considered by some outsiders to be one of the nation's best-kept higher-education secrets is quietly flourishing."
Carolyn J. Mooney, Chronicle of Higher Education, 4/6/88

"I think the tribal colleges are one of the bright spots in all of Indian education."
Alan Lovesee, Associate Council, House Committee on Education and Labor

"Young men and women who go directly to state colleges have often struggled in an environment that has a lot of alien factors. The tribal colleges have been more successful than many of our mainstream institutions, which are disconnected from their communities."
Vito Perrone, Vice President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

"In my 40 years as a teacher, educator and at the Foundation, I've learned most claims bear little relationship to reality. Here at Pine Ridge the terrific difficulties are understood by the leadership but not accepted as insuring automatic defeat."
Dr. John Corbally, President of the Macarthur Foundation in a New York Times article after a visit to Oglala Lakota College.

"I never had a feeling come over me as I did when I read your self-study. The pride of the people came through. In your spirit, your consensus process and the value of the individual you have something here that many other organizations aspire to have."
Dr. Shelton Marlow, New Mexico State University, 1987 NCA Team member

We use these quotes, not to be boastful, since although we are proud of OLC we acknowledge our limitations, but to gain credibility so people will consider the things we have done to be successful as ways they might improve access for minorities and, indeed, improve their institutions.

Some Things That Have Made OLC Work

Some of these characteristics can be adopted or adapted by most other colleges. Others might cause college officials to say that they don't fit or are too far out. We offer these to pick and choose from as appropriate.

OLC is a new animal "a 4 year community college" and we are progressing to an even more startling entity, a "community university." Although not officially recognized as a community college because the definition excludes schools offering Bachelor's degrees, the College is one of the most "community" colleges in the country. Some of the elements include:

"of the community"
- started by the people of the Pine Ridge Reservation
- chartered by the Oglala Sioux Tribe
- maintain a strong cultural base requiring Lakota Studies courses as core and integrating Lakota values and culture in all aspects of instruction and management
- work toward a true implementation of Lakota as our official language with academic respect

"by the community"
- 9 Board of Trustees members are elected by Tribal members
- 3 Board of Trustees members represent the Tribal government
- 9 Local Boards provide governance for District Centers
- teach classes in the nine population centers of the reservation and in Rapid City where there is a large number of Oglalas
- staff is 77% Indian with another 10% married to Indians or long time reservation residents
- Piya Wiconi Okolakiciye (staff/faculty senate) and the Standing Committees involve all staff and faculty and representative students in policy making

"for the community"
- the Mission and Purposes very clearly pertain to the reservation and have key emphasis areas on Tribal, Cultural, Academic and Community
- key goals in Visions 1992 (5 year Plan) focus on leadership, community development and economic development
- work closely with the Tribe, with Districts, with communities, with elders and with organizations
- set up the OLC Research Institute to provide current knowledge on reservation demographics, conditions and development alternatives
- implement programs in areas of key reservation concerns: health and wellness, literacy, alcohol and drug abuse and family counseling
- function as the official Tribal archives and the reservation's only public library

One other element or characteristic that is inherent in the above or implied from them is that the College is student centered. The major emphasis of the faculty is teaching and of the support staff is counseling and student development.

It may seem that these elements, characteristics and practices only fit the reservation and are unique to OLC, let us offer some final thoughts.

Final Thoughts

To begin the end of this paper let us say that we agree with and we are practicing many of the recommendations cited previously for assisting minorities in education. We agree with information systems, college survival courses, counseling, tutoring, remedial courses, minority studies, diagnostic testing for placement not screening out, but we feel these do not go far enough.

If colleges and universities truly desire to recruit and retain minority students on a large scale basis, especially poor minority students, more must be done. A major commitment of purpose, time and money will have to be made.

First, colleges and universities must say that part of their mission is to help assure that minorities and poor people have access to their knowledge and learning at the same levels that the rest of society does. We do not have to repeat the reasons why a college education, at some level, is necessary in this technological and information society.

Second, they must become a physical presence in the minority community by setting up linkages with minority community colleges, Tribal colleges, community based colleges. To do this they will have to overcome mistrust built by prior exploitation and they will also have to admit that they can expect legitimate gains from these community-based institutions. In places where there are no existing colleges they can set up centers where courses are offered; they can physically go to the reservation, hollow, ghetto, or barrio.

Third, a climate must be developed mot only at these centers but at the main campuses. Universities are places for exchange of ideas, "communities of learning." Faculty and administrators need to be taught the realities of being a minority or living in poverty. In their dealings with minority institutions or communities they must not have the attitude of "adoption" but rather "marrying" or becoming a "sister or brother."

Fourth, as part of this climate a cultural base must be developed or maintained. Corporate culture is all the rage in management circles, ethics is the new "in" course in business schools, Peter Drucker says that management must be embedded in the culture of the people. Rather than looking at minority cultures as negative,

colleges and universities need to have minority institutions help them understand the positive values that minority cultures have to impart. OLC has been successful because it has sought to integrate Lakota values and culture not only in its curriculum but also in its management. Some of the Lakota values such as wisdom, bravery, respect for others, respect for the earth, generosity, fortitude and sense of sacred time translate very easily to the terms of modern leadership and future transformation of the world such as sense of spirituality, information systems, entrepreneurship, sensitivity to employees and customers (and students), ecological awareness, caring for each other, persistence toward a vision and having a sense of timing in tune with natural cycles.

Fifth, there must be a commitment of money to do all of the above and to get adequate funds to the actual student. Capital campaigns are now approaching billion dollar targets. They all mention scholarships somewhere in their literature. Some of this money must go to where it is truly needed. The first capital campaign on record was done by Harvard University in 1641 for the "education of the savages." We hope we don't see the word "savages" in the current Harvard literature but we would like to see Indians or Indian people or Native Americans. Actually colleges and universities might be able to reactivate alumni and donors who don't give anymore since they feel their alma mater is plush.

In conclusion, let us end on a more personal or human note. Our greatest moment at OLC is at graduation when we see students from twenty to sixty get their degrees, when we hear how OLC has helped develop their minds and change their lives, when we shake hands with Elaine Kills in Sight who lived in a 10'x 40' trailer with no electricity or water, had six children and walked or hitchhiked seven miles each way to class but achieved her Bachelors Degree.

Thank you.

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